

## WESTERN



The Western Region covers an area of approximately 2,3921 square kilometres, which is about 10 per cent of Ghana's total land area. The region has about 75 per cent of its vegetation within the high forest zone of Ghana, and lies in the equatorial climatic zone that is characterized by moderate temperatures. It is also the wettest part of Ghana with an average rainfall of 1,600mm per annum. It is bordered on the east by the Central Region, to the west by the Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire), to the north by Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo Regions, and to the south by the Gulf of Guinea. The southernmost part of Ghana lies in the region, at Cape Three Points near Busua, in the Ahanta West District.

### Urban/Rural

The rural/urban classification of localities is population based, with a population size of 5,000 or more being urban and less than 5,000 being rural.

### Physical Features

The region has about 75 per cent of its vegetation within the high forest zone of Ghana. The south-western areas of the region are noted for their rain forest, interspersed with patches of mangrove forest along the coast and coastal wetlands, while a large expanse of high tropical forest and semi-deciduous forest is also found in the northern part of the region. The Western Region has 24 forest reserves, which account for about 40 per cent of the forest reserves in the country.

Prominent among them are the Bia Reserve, Cape Three Points National Park, and the Ankasa/Nini Suhvien Forest and Game Reserve.

The Western Region lies in the equatorial climatic zone that is characterised by moderate temperatures, ranging from 22°C at nightfall to 34°C during the day. The Region is the wettest part of Ghana, with a double maxima rainfall pattern averaging 1,600 mm per annum. The two rainfall peaks fall between May-July and September/October. In addition to the two major rainy seasons, the region also experiences intermittent minor rains all the year round. This high rainfall regime creates much moisture culminating in high relative humidity, ranging from 70 to 90 per cent in most parts of the region.

### Political And Administrative Structure

The Western Region was one vast province covering the present Western and Central Regions, and known as the Western Province, with its capital in Cape Coast, until the country achieved republican status in 1960. The Region, as presently constituted, became a separate administration in July 1960, with Sekondi as its capital, when the Central Region was carved out of the erstwhile province. Present day urbanised settings have made Sekondi and Takoradi one big metropolis.

The Regional Co-ordinating Council (RCC), which is the highest decision-making body, comprises the Regional Minister who is also its Chairperson, District Chief Executives, Presiding Members of the various District Assemblies and two Paramount Chiefs nominated by the Regional House of Chiefs. There is also a Regional Coordinating Director, who is the Secretary to the RCC and the head of the civil administration of the region. The Region is divided into 11 districts.

Each of the districts has a District Assembly headed by the District Chief Executive. The District Chief Executive is appointed by the President, but has to be endorsed by a two-thirds majority of members of the Assembly. Meetings of the Assembly are chaired by a Presiding Member elected by members of the Assembly. Majority of members of the District Assembly are elected by secret ballot on a non-partisan basis. In addition to the elected members, there are also members nominated to represent various specified stakeholders, in accordance with the constitution.

The Region has 19 Parliamentarians representing the people at the constituency level at the National Assembly. The Members of Parliament are also members of the various district assemblies in the districts in which their parliamentary constituencies are located. At the community level, there are two urban councils, thirty town councils and several unit committees under the jurisdiction of the district assemblies. These local authorities complement the functions of the district assemblies.

### Cultural And Social Structure

The Western Region comprises five major indigenous ethnic groups. Oral tradition has it that early ancestors of these people migrated from the source of the River Nile in search of fertile land and also to escape from political and social conflict. These groupings exhibit a high degree of cultural homogeneity, especially in the areas of lineage, inheritance and succession, marriage and religion.

The location occupied by the five major ethnic groups in the region cannot be clearly and unambiguously defined, as their boundaries overlap. The Achantas, who form about 6 percent, and the Nzemas (including the Evalues) 11 per cent of Ghanaians by birth in the region, occupy the entire coastline from Shama on the east to the western border of Ghana. Both the Ahanta and Nzema celebrate the 'Kundum' festival in remembrance of their ancestors. Since after, and on the basis of the results of the 2000 Census, new districts have been created. These are Bia, with its capital at Essam-Debiso and Amenfi East with its capital at Wassa Akropong.

The Wassa people, who form about 12 per cent of Ghanaians by birth in the region, can be found further inland off the coast into the interior. Their annual 'Eddie' festival is celebrated to coincide with the harvest period of farm produce. The Sefwis who represent about 11 per cent and Aowins who constitute about 3 per cent of Ghanaians by birth in the region are in the northern part of the region and share a boundary with the Brong Ahafo Region. Both groups celebrate the annual Alluolie (Yam) festival.<sup>5</sup> The languages/dialects of the Sefwis and Aowins are very similar to each other, and to the Ahanta and Nzema languages. The four groups can converse with each other in their own peculiar dialects or languages and still understand each other.

There are other indigenous minorities such as the Pepesa. The Wassa are divided into various sub-ethnic groups, namely the Wassa Fiase/Mpohor and Wassa Amenfi. The Pepesa, who are located within the Fiase Traditional area at Dompim, Simpa and the surrounding villages, south of Tarkwa, have their own peculiar dialect more akin to, and understood by the Nzemas, Achantas, Aowins and Sefwis. The Nzemas are divided into the Evalue, Dwira, Ellembele and Jomoro. Their various versions of the Nzema language differ only very slightly in very few insignificant ways. There is however only one standard written Nzema language.

It is worth noting that although Ahanta, Nzema, Wassa, Sefwi and Brossa (Aowin) are the languages spoken by the indigenes of this region, Fante is widely spoken as a second language in the southern part of the region. It is the school language and medium of instruction in lower primary classes in many of the basic schools. Twi is more widely spoken in the Sefwi and Bibiani areas even though Fante is also widely spoken in the same areas. The only other language used as a school language/medium of instruction is Nzema, even though Ahanta is now a written language.

About 18 per cent of Ghanaians by birth in the region are Fantes. Apart from the Fantes, other ethnic groups who have migrated into the region are the Asantes (7.3%), Ewes (5.9%), Brongs (3.4%) and Kusasis (2.9%). Most of the region's inhabitants are either Ghanaians by birth (92.2%) or by naturalisation (4.1%), with a few immigrants from other neighbouring West African countries. There is complete freedom of religious belief in the region; however, Christianity (81.0%) and Islam (8.5%) are dominant. Traditional religion is also practised by 1.5 per cent of the region's population, while

as many as 8 per cent reported no religious affiliation.

The level of literacy in the region is 58.2 percent, compared to the national average of 57.9 per cent. The level of literacy for females (47.9%) in the region is low as compared to males (68.0%). This low literacy level for females could be linked to the low level of educational attainment in the region. The highest educational attainment level by females (42.4%) in the region is primary, while for males (42.4%) it is middle/junior secondary school (JSS). These figures are unacceptable, and access to education should be linked with parity in basic school enrolment, if there should be any improvement in literacy levels. Nearly two-thirds (64.3%) of those currently in school in the region are at the primary level while only 21.3 per cent are in JSS.

The composition and structure of the Ghanaian household are a general reflection of the social structure of the Ghanaian society. The Western Region is no exception, and most households in the region follow the traditional household setting of a man, wife and children, with an extended family composition comprising of other relations. A good proportion of females (61.4%) in the region are in some form of co-habitation as against 56.6 per cent of males. Co-habitation includes formal unions that are customary or religious as well as informal unions for persons 15 years and older. For the region as a whole, 58.9 per cent are in such unions, while 29.3 per cent have never married. Children in the region constitute about 40.0 per cent of the average household composition, mostly headed by males.

The head of the household is the one who is identified as the head by members of the household and not necessarily the one who maintains the household. For the region, 72 per cent male-headed households as against 28 per cent female-headed households. Other relatives and grandchildren, who are an extension of the nuclear family, make up 26 per cent of the household structure. According to the 2000 Census, there are 410,412 households in the region, occupying 259,874 housing units, which give an average of 1.6 households per house. Comparable past averages are 2.2 for 1970 and 2.0 for 1984. This may be the result of increases in supply of houses or a slow-down in the formation of new households.

The average household size, that is, the average number of persons in a household, has been on the increase since 1960, when 3.8 was recorded. This increased to 4.0 in 1970 and to 4.4 in 1984. The average number of persons per household for 2000 is 4.7. Notwithstanding the constant increase over the years, the household size in the region is still below the national average of 5.1. The observed large household sizes over the years may be the result of the high fertility rate (4.4 per woman) prevailing in the region and the practice of adult children with offspring, staying with their parents.

The number of houses in the region increased from 61,103 in 1960 to 127,427 in 1984, and further to 259,874 in 2000. This constitutes a percentage increase in housing stock of about 103.9 during the 16-year period. Increase in housing stock has lagged behind population growth as reflected in the number of people per house in the region, which is still considered too high, notwithstanding its steady decline from 10.2 in 1970 to 9.0 in 1984, and further to 7.4 in 2000. Household members or relatives own more than half of the houses in the region; and generally make them available to other relatives either for a token rent or free of charge. Most of the houses, particularly in the rural areas, are constructed with sun-dried mud bricks with cemented floors and corrugated metal roofing materials.

Households in the urban areas have access to electricity, while a large number of peri-urban and rural households are also gradually gaining access to electricity through the rural electrification programme, even though this programme has a very long way to go and has touched only a few communities which are fairly close to urban centres. Those without electricity use mainly kerosene as lighting fuel. Fuel for cooking is mainly charcoal and firewood, even for quite a sizeable number of urban dwellers, even though liquid petroleum gas and electricity are used for cooking in some homes, particularly in the big cities and towns. Treated pipe-borne water is available mainly in the urban areas while the rural areas rely mainly on surface waters such as rivers, streams small lakes and springs. A few have access to deep boreholes and relatively shallow but clean water wells.

#### Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The population of the region is 1,924,577, constituting about 10 per cent of the total population of the country. With a population growth rate of 3.2, the region's population is expected to double by 2020. The population is relatively young, with over 40 per cent within the age group 0-14, and a dependency ratio of 88.3 per cent. The population density is 80.5 persons per square kilometre. Females constitute 49.2 per cent of the population, translating into a sex ratio of 103.4. The proportion of urban to total population is 36.3 per cent, with the three most urbanised districts being Shama-Ahanta East (100%), Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai (37.5%) and Wassa West (35.6%).

There are five major indigenous ethnic groups, namely, the Achantas, who form 6.3 per cent of Ghanaians by birth in the region, Nzemas including the Evalue (10.6%), Wassa (11.7%), Sefwis (10.9%) and Aowins (2.5%). It is worth noting that 18.2 per cent of Ghanaians by birth in the region are Fantes, even though these are not indigenes of the region, but are settlers who migrated several years ago from the Central Region, and have subsequently totally integrated into the indigenous population.

There is freedom of religion in the region; however Christianity (81%) and Islam (8.5%) are the two major religious groups. The Pentecostals constitute the largest single Christian group (26.1%), followed by the Protestants (19.5%) and Catholics (19.4%). Other Christian groups constitute another 16.1 per cent. Islam (8.5%) is practised mainly in Aowin-Suaman (10.4%), Sefwi-Wiaso (10.1%) and Juabeso-Bia (12.4%), all three being districts with significant migrant populations from the mainly Islamic northern parts of the country, particularly the Mole-Dagbon areas. Traditional African religion is also practised by 1.5 per cent, while 8.2 per cent of the population profess no religion.

The level of literacy in the region is 58.2 percent, with females (47.9%) recording a lower proportion compared to males (68.0%). Nearly two-thirds (64.3%) of those currently in school are at the primary level, while 21.3 per cent are in junior secondary school. There is therefore a very high attrition rate between primary and junior secondary school levels. Several reasons account for the high dropout during the transition from primary to junior secondary. These include the unavailability of junior secondary schools within many rural localities, resulting in pupils having to travel 10 kilometres or more to the nearest junior secondary school. Other important factors are affordability and poor infra-structural facilities.

In recent years, however, there has been a tremendous effort to improve both quality and quantity of infrastructural facilities of primary and junior secondary schools.

The number of houses in the region is 259,874 as at 2000. More than half of the houses belong to household members who either rent them out to paying tenants, or permit family members to live in them without any charge. Most houses, particularly in the rural areas, are constructed with sun-dried mud bricks with cemented floors and corrugated metal roofing materials.

There are 410,412 households in the region, which gives an average of 1.6 households per house. Of these 72 per cent are male-headed as against 28 per cent headed by females. The number of persons per household is 4.7 as compared to the national average of 5.1. Many households in the urban areas have access to electricity, while a relatively small but significant number of rural households are gradually gaining access through the rural electrification programme. Those without electricity use mainly kerosene as lighting fuel.

Fuel for cooking is mainly charcoal and firewood, even though liquid petroleum gas and electricity are used by some urban dwellers. Potable water, either treated pipe-borne water or water from deep boreholes, is available mainly in urban areas. The rural areas obtain water mainly from rivers, streams, small lakes, springs and shallow hand-dug wells. Potable water is however gradually being made available to rural communities through the sinking of deep boreholes.

Marriages are either formal or informal unions. Those in such marriages constitute 52.8 per cent of the marriageable population (15 years and older), while 36.6 per cent have never married. There are more divorced and widowed females than males. The greater proportion of widowed females is due probably to females normally marrying older males who then die earlier and leave them widowed. Widowed females tend generally not to remarry while widowed males generally remarry.

#### Economic Characteristics

The region is endowed with considerable natural resources, which give it a significant economic importance within the context of national development. It is the largest producer of cocoa, rubber and coconut, and one of the major producers of oil palm. The rich tropical forest makes it one of the largest producers of raw and sawn timber as well as processed wood products. A wide variety of minerals, including gold, bauxite, iron, diamonds and manganese are either being exploited or are potentially exploitable. The region's total geological profile and mineral potential are yet to be fully determined.

The four major occupations in the region are agriculture including fishing, animal husbandry and hunting (58.1%), production and transport work (14.5%), sales work (10.2%) and professional and technical work (5.4%). The major industrial activities in the region are agriculture, excluding fishing but including forestry and hunting (58.1%), mining and quarrying (2.4%), manufacturing (10.2%) and wholesale and retail trade (10.3%). The working population in the private formal (13.5%) and the public (6.0%) sectors are mainly employees of private and public sector employers.

### Economic Characteristics Of Districts

The Western Region is one of the most economically active regions in the country. Both agriculture and industry feature prominently in the region's economic activities, and influence the demographic complexities of the various districts. The economically active population in all the districts except the Shama-Ahanta East metropolitan area exceeds 70 per cent. The lower figure for Shama-Ahanta East may be due partly to the relatively high percentage of students in the district. The level of unemployment is generally low.

The unemployment rate as observed is below 10 per cent in all the districts. The relatively high unemployment rate in the two industrialised urban districts of Wassa West and Shama-Ahanta East may be due to the large number of unemployed but unskilled school leavers who drift annually from the rural areas in search of non-existing jobs.

In general, male unemployment is higher than female unemployment. This is particularly so in the urbanised southern districts of Shama-Ahanta East and Wassa West, while the reverse is the case in some of the northern districts such as Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai, Sefwi-Wiawso, Aowin- Suaman and Juabeso-Bia. Agriculture is the principal occupation, engaging a large proportion of people (50% or more) in all districts, except Shama-Ahanta East (19.2%) and Wassa West (44.5%). People in Shama-Ahanta East and Wassa West are engaged mainly in production and transport work, sales and services.

More than two-thirds of the economically active population in all the districts of the region are made up of self-employed persons with no employees, except in Shama-Ahanta East (50%). The active population in Shama-Ahanta East consists mainly of employees who work for a public or private employer. Agriculture (excluding fishing) remains the biggest industrial activity in the region, employing more than 50 per cent of workers in all districts except Jomoro (46.4%), Shama-Ahanta East (14.5%) and Wassa West (45.8%). In all the districts, the private sector (both formal and informal), provides employment to more than 80 per cent of the working population

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